WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?

A CHRISTMAS SOUVENIR

BY

E. A. WOODS D. D.

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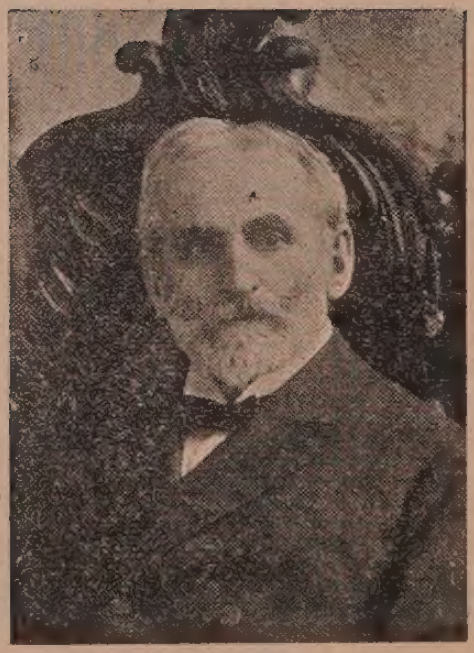

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As requested by the author's class in Systematic Theology in the Pacific Coast Baptist Theological Seminary, it is now published. E. A. W.

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SERMON

"WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?"

MATT 22:42.

The great doctrines of Christianity and its conquering forces have their origin and their centre in the person of Christ, its founder. This is a distinguishing characteristic of Christianity. In the case of other religions, such as those founded by Zoroaster or Confucius or Buddha, the question is not, what they were, but what they taught These men spoke concerning a Way and a Truth and a Life. But Christ said, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life." The question, "What did Christ teach?" is of immense importance, but back of this is the question of questions, "Who is the Christ?" This is the supreme question of theology today.

Any man who enters the Christian ministry should settle this question for himself absolutely and finally.

"First seek thy Savior out and dwell
Beneath the shadow of His roof
Till thou hast scanned His features well,
And know Him for the Christ by proof.

"Then potent with the spell of Heaven
Go, and thy erring brother gain;
Entice him home to be forgiven,
Till he, too, sees his Savior plain."

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Let us seek answer to the question of the text in the Christian Scriptures, in Christian Experience and in Christian History.

(1) The testimony of the Christian Scriptures.

Opening the New Testament at the first chapter of John's Gospel, I read, "In he beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." I do not pause and inquire what is meant by "the Word," for in a verse which follows I read, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth." The "Word" then is the Christ. I will read it so. "In the beginning was the Christ, and the Christ was with God and the Christ was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. That was the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." "And the Christ was made flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth." This same truth is stated frequently in this Gospel, in John's Epistles and in the book of Revelation. In other parts of the New Testament, especially in the writings of Paul, Christ is declared to have created "all things that are in heaven and that are in earth"; that "for Christ and through Him and to Him are all things"; that "He laid the foundations of the earth, and that the heavens are the work of His hands"; that "He upholds all things by the word of His power"; that "in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Similar statements oc-

cur very frequently in the New Testament. These passages taken together, declare: 1. That Christ was in the beginning with God and was God. 2. That He was the Creator of all things, and that man was created by Him and in His image and likeness. 3. That He was a light which lighteth every man who cometh into the world.

This doctrine of the "Logos"—the Eternal Christ—is the very foundation of a true Christology. While it is generally recognized by theologians, it has not been given the place of prominence which its importance demands Some of the teachings of Christ and some of His works, which otherwise seem strange and almost incredible, become probable and easy of belief when we remember that Christ is the "Eternal Christ," "the creator of all things.' If Christ created man in His own image and likeness, then it is not unthinkable nor impossible for Him to enter humanity and become the Incarnate Christ—"God manifest in the flesh." If He should thus enter humanity, it is probable that it would be by what we call a miraculous birth. The story of His birth is told in two of the Gospels, Matthew and Luke. These accounts of Christ's birth are inseparable parts of these Gospels and are entitled to full credit. Matthew wrote his account of Christ's birth with an easy familiarity which indicates knowledge at first hand. It is much briefer than Luke's, and seems to have been written from Joseph's standpoint. In a dream an angel speaks to Joseph, and tells him not to put away Mary, his betrothed wife, and informs him of her miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit. Joseph, struck dumb, obeys in silence, and in silence passes out of history. Matthew states that this birth was in fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14, "Behold a virgin

shall conceive" etc.

Luke, the author of the third Gospel, was a man of education and wrote with the careful preparation of a historian, who "had perfect understanding of all things from the very first." He tells of the Annunciation by the angel to the virgin Mary, and she replies and rejoices and prophecies. In his record Luke reveals so delicately the workings of a devout mother's heart in the supreme experience of woman's life: the story is told with such tenderness and delicacy; it so glows with the flame of Hebrew piety that it compels belief and renders the charge of forgery an impossible one. To declare that Joseph or some unnamed man was the father of the Holy Child does violence to the known characters of Joseph and Mary, and is morally unthinkable. The internal evidence of the truth of this record is so positive as to separate it from the myths and fables or forgeries of those ages.

The pre-existence of Christ who was the Creator of all things, make it probable that if He enters humanity, that entrance will be supernatural. Certain prophecies of the Old Testament find in this event their fulfillment.

The New Testament narratives of Christ's birth stand the tests of critical scholarship. If these records are not true, that birth was illegitimate and Mary is dishonored. But Mary rejoices and praises God, and her friends honor her and rejoice with her. Christ called Mary His mother repeatedly, and provided for her when dying, but He never alluded to Joseph as His father. From childhood, when in the temple at twelve years of age, to His last utterance upon the Cross, He always and repeatedly called God His Father.

This story of the birth of Christ has commanded the

almost universal belief of Christians in all the centuries. Art has embalmed it. Music has chanted it. Poetry has found in it a most inspiring theme. Mothers have told it to their children who have repeated it in joyful songs. It is so sweet and genuine, so full of joy and hope; it so harmonizes with all that we know of Christ and His love for men that it will always be dear to the Christian heart and increasing millions will chant it each Christmas Day.

Christ having become the "Incarnate Christ," "God manifest in his flesh,"—let us seek further testimony in the New Testament in answer to the question of our Text. This testimony is concerning Christ's Teachings, His claims for Himself, and His Miracles. His Teachings had as their themes Diety, Duty and Destiny. He taught that God is our Father and that in all our relations to Him, in Worship, Prayer, Forgiveness and Service we are to recognize Him as our Father. He taught that men are to be saved from sin by faith in Himself. He taught that there will be a final judgment, when the righteous will be rewarded and the wicked will be punished. He taught "as one having authority." George J. Romanes declares that one of the strongest evidences for Christianity is the fact that Christ taught "no doctrines which the subsequent growth of human knowledge,—whether in natural science, ethics, political economy or elsewhere—has had to discount." Truly "never man spake like this man." His teachings transcending all human knowledge bear the stamp of divine origin, and separate Him from all the sons of men.

His claims for Himself were such as no other man has made. He claimed to be the Son of God and equal with

God. He said "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." "I am in the Father and the Father in me." He accepted worship and claimed the power to forgive sin. He announced forgiveness and salvation to all who had faith in Him. He declared that all power in heaven and earth was given unto Him, and that He should sit upon the throne of judgment at the last day.

His Miracles or "Mighty Works" had an important place in His life upon the earth. Here we approach the great battle-field of the centuries. Some men have denied the possibility of miracles, others declare them so improbable that they cannot be believed, while some say that the Scripture Miracles, if true, are a hindrance rather than an aid to Christianity.

Hume defined a Miracle as "a violation of the laws of nature which cannot be established by any proof derived from human testimony."

Mill says that if there is a God, the difficulty about Miracles sinks into insignificance.

Froude writes, "Without faith in Miracles and the Supernatural, prayer is nonsense."

But these men stood outside the Christian Church. I will quote from others who are standard bearers in evangelic churches:

Dr. George A. Gordon writes, "A disbelief in Christ's Miracles does not affect the essentials of religion. Christianity today does not need the miracles, but is hindered and burdened by them."

Prof. Bacon of Yale, in one of his Earl lectures is reported to have said, "The miracles of the Bible are over drawn reports of unusual incidents, and are to a certain extent literally untrue, and of subordinate importance."

Prof. Foster of Chicago University writes, "Any intelligent man in this age of the world who affirms his faith in the miracle stories of the New Testament as a record of actual facts, does not know what intellectual honesty means."

Prof. Christlieb writes, "The beginning of Christianity is a miracle; its author is a miracle; its progress depends upon miracles; and miracles will hereafter be its consummation."

Prof. Borden Bowne writes, "Christianity is essentially supernatural, i. e., miraculous. Its miracles are not outside proofs, but are a part of the revelation itself."

Prof. E. H. Johnson writes, "In accepting the resurrection of Christ we accept His Divinity, and with His Divinity all the miracles of the New Testament become not only credible, but indispensible. If He be the Son of God, He must prove it beyond reasonable doubt."

These opposing statements are from men who stand high in Christian churches. Is it therefore a drawn battle? Perhaps it is enough for us to learn from the Christian Scriptures in what spirit Christ performed these miracles and what value He put upon them.

In His life upon the earth Christ revealed Himself tender-hearted, compassionate and full of sympathy. This was natural to Him. If in passing through Jericho He came upon a poor blind man, who begged him to restore his sight, and it would be the first impulse of His nature to do so, if He could, and He did. If in another place He saw some lepers standing afar off, who cried unto Him, "Master have mercy on us," moved with pity and conscious of His power over that disease He would heal them, and He did. Coming to the home in Bethany—

it was all the home he had—and finding Lazarus dead and the sisters weeping, He wept with them. Conscious of His divine power and as a prophecy of His final victory over death, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth," and he who was dead came forth.

These miracles of Christ were natural to Him. They were in perfect keeping with His character and purpose, and were essential parts of His teaching. Each miracle was wrought for a definite purpose and illustrated both His doctrine and His mission. Instead of being hard to believe and a hindrance to His work, they are just what we should expect, and if they were wanting we should be disappointed. These miracles flowed from His hands as smoothly and naturally as His words of grace and tenderness flowed from His lips.

See now the value which Christ put upon His miracles. Early in his ministry, John the Baptist, shut up in prison, discouraged and despondent, sent some of his disciples to Christ with the inquiry, "Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" John, like Elijah his prototype, had his hour of darkness. When the messengers came, Christ was healing the sick who crowded around him. He sent back this message: "Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them." John knew his Isaiah well, and would recognize the prophecy and its fulfillment. Christ thus declared to John that these miracles were the proofs of his Messiahship. If they were of value to Christ as proofs then, they have the same value now and in all the ages. It is important for Chris-

tians today to know that in Christ the prophecies were fulfilled, and that He justified His claim as the Son of God to the age in which He lived.

At another time Christ was teaching in a certain house with a crowd surrounding Him, and four men let a palsied man on a couch, down through the roof before Christ. He said unto the sick of the palsy, "Son thy sins be forgiven thee," and the Scribes cried out "Blasphemy! who can forgive sins but God only?" Christ replied, "That ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins," He saith to the sick of the palsy, "Arise and take up thy bed and go thy way into thy house." Here Christ uses this miracle as proof that He had power to forgive sins and hence was the Son of God as He claimed to be. Whatever this miracle was intended to prove to the people then, it proves to us now.

When Christ urged upon the Jews that His miracles proved that He was the Messiah, they admitted the miracles, but declared that it was the power of the evil one and not of God that He wrought them. It is important for us and for all Christians to know that in Christ the prophecies of Him were fulfilled.

Christ urged His disciples to believe His teachings and His promises and spoke of His "Mighty Works" as evidences of their truth. On the night of His betrayal He said to them, "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me, or else believe me for the very works sake."

Paul made use of Christ's miracles as proofs of the

doctrines which he preached. On three public occasions he repeated the story of his own miraculous conversion. It is true that some critics suggest that this experience was an apoplectic fit. To this suggestion Prof. Borden Bowne replies: "St. Paul may have had a fit on the road to Damascus, but it is the only known fit that has been followed by such mighty consequences."

Paul declares that all the doctrines of salvation, depend upon the miracle of Christ's resurrection. He writes "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain and your faith is also vain. Yea and we are found false witnesses for God. But now is Christ risen from the dead.'

Thus we see that Christ's Teachings, His Person and His "Mighty Works," are parts of one manifestation of God. Some of Christ's miracles are doctrines and some of His doctrines are themselves miracles. The two supreme miracles of Christ—His Incarnation and His Resurrection—are the two greatest doctrines of Christianity.

If these miracles are "burdens and hindrances" to Christianity; if they are "overdrawn reports and literally untrue"; if those who believe them to be actual facts "do not know what intellectual honesty means," then surely Christ is discredited and His claims are false. Nay rather, as writes the author of "Ecce Homo," "Christ's Teachings, His claims for Himself, and His miraculous power make the unspeakable condescension of the Cross a magnet to draw all men."

Here then, is the great dilemna. Either Christ was what He claimed to be, "God manifest in the flesh," or He was the greatest deceiver the world has ever seen. As says the Latin proverb, "Aut Christus Deus, aut homo

non bonus est." "Either Christ was God, or He was not a good man."

Here then is the testimony of the Christian Scriptures in answer to the question of the Text. Christ is the "Eternal Christ" who is God the Creator of all things, and "the light which lighteth every man who cometh into the world." He is "God manifest in the flesh" and is thus the "Incarnate Christ," who lived upon the earth the "human life of God," and is a Savior from sin for all those who believe in Him. "What think ye of Christ?"

"If Christ is a man, . .
And only a man, I say,
Of all mankind I will follow Him,
I will follow Him alway.

"If Christ is God,
And the only God, I swear
I will follow Him through Heaven and Hell
The Earth and the Sea and the Air."

(2) The Testimony of Christian Experience.

The disciples of Christ, for a long time did not really know Him. They heard His word and saw His miracles, but they thought of Him as the Messiah, who, as a worldly King, should redeem Israel. John and Andrew and Peter and Philip had met Him and believed in Him as the Messiah. One day Philip brought his friend Nathaniel to see Christ. As they came into His presence Christ pointed to Nathaniel and said to the other disciples, "Behold an Israelite indeed in whom there is no

guile." Nathaniel said: "Whence knowest thou me?" And Chist replied, "When thou wast under the fig tree I saw thee." Nathaniel answered, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel." The fig tree was Nathaniel's place of prayer. He now recognized Christ as the unseen one who had met him so often there. Because of intimacy in his place of prayer, he knew Him to be the Son of God. He was the first one to really know Christ.

Some time afterwards, Christ said to His disciples: "Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" On hearing their answer He said to them, "But whom say ye that I am?" Peter replied, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Jesus answered, "Blessed art thou, Simon, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in Heaven." Peter came to know Christ by a personal revelation.

On the evening of the first resurrection day, ten of the disciples were gathered and Christ appeared unto them, and they recognized Him. Judas had gone to his own place and Thomas was absent. He was a silent man and we know little of him. A few weeks previous Christ and His disciples were in Galilee, avoiding Judea, for the "Jews sought to kill Him." Now, Christ would return to Bethany, for word had come that Lazarus was sick. The disciples were unwilling to return with Christ. He at last told them that Lazarus was dead, and said, "Let us go to him." Thomas did not often speak, but now as no one seemed willing to go with Christ, he said, "Let us go that we may die with Him," and led by him they consented to go. This Thomas who was ready to die with Christ was the absent one. Do not nick-name Thomas.

When he was told that Christ had appeared to the ten disciples he replied, "When I see what you have seen I will believe." One week later Christ appeared to them again, and now Thomas is present. Christ now offers him the same proofs which he had given the other disciples. But he looked at Christ and said, "My Lord and my God." He seemed to know and understand Christ better than any other disciple. Was it a special revelation that enabled Thomas to utter this fullest expression that human tongue had made, "My Lord and my God?"

One by one, by a personal experience, the disciples came to understand Christ's character and mission. At the day of Pentecost they had given up their old ideas of the Messiah, and knowing Him now as the Son of God they rejoiced in his presence, though absent from their sight.

Paul knew Christ by special revelation, and during his life of wonderful self-denial and service he had the continued presence and support of Him who had all power and had promised to be with His followers always.

Augustine, who in his youth hesitated between the example of his father, who was an unbeliever and profligate, and his mother, the saintly Monica, and at the same time was living in open sin, at length heard the divine voice calling upon him to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ and not make provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof." From that time he felt that Christ was constantly with him as companion and friend. He gained that self-mastery for which he had vainly struggled, and completely triumphed over the evil habits which had enslaved his youth. The companionship of the Indwelling Christ gave tone to his whole life.

Dr. Thomas Chalmers, one of the greatest preachers of

the modern centuries, entered the Christian ministry without any special religious experience. But his heart was not in his work. After a few years and while preparing an article on "Christianity" for the Edinburgh Cyclopedia, the Lord met him and he came into an intimate companionship with Christ, and his life was entirely changed He did not need to tell of his new experience, for the people whom he met and the church to which he ministered felt that his life-work had just begun. From that time to the close of his wonderful career "he lived as seeing Him who is invisible."

A missionary who had spent many years in India tells of preaching the first Christian sermon in a certain village. At the close of the sermon a man of advanced years came forward and desired to confess his faith in Christ. On being asked if it was a new purpose in his life he replied, "No. More than twenty years ago I felt the burden of my sins. I tried in vain to free myself from them and to master the evil in my heart. At last in utter despair I threw myself upon the ground and prayed to him who made me, whoever he was, to forgive my sins and to help me to rise above them, and the answer came. Some one spoke to me and delivered me, and he has been my guide and companion all these years, but I never knew his name till you told me today."

In a village in New England a pastor was holding revival meetings and a number of the young people had been converted and some had been baptized. In the village was a half-witted youth called Foolish Jim. He could not read and no one had attempted to teach him He had associated with vile men and boys, and had become so unclean that mothers kept their boys away from

him, and no one tried to reform him. He came to the meetings night after night. One evening when others arose to express their purpose to commence the Christian life, Foolish Jim arose, but no one spoke to him. On one evening he arose and his face was all aglow as he said, "I've seen Jesus and I want to be baptized." And now they found that he had seen Christ, and he was baptized. He learned to read his Bible and became a pure simple Christian. We read that after Lazarus was raised from the dead the people used to gather not only to hear Christ speak, but also to see Lazarus who had been dead but was now alive. So people used to come to see and talk with Foolish Jim, and this wonder was greater than that. Though foolish he knew Christ and had a real Christian experience.

Many who have never heard the gospel story know the real Christ by experience, and when the historic facts of Christianity are made known to them, the response of their faith is immediate. The hunger of the human soul is universal, and Christ the bread of life alone satisfies that hunger. This universal experience of the presence and power of Christ is abundant proof of His Divinity There are vast crowds of witnesses rising up in every age who testify to the new creating power of Christ in their hearts. Lives have been transformed, hardship, persecution and even martyrdom have been endured joyfully, because of the sustaining presence and power of Christ, the Indwelling Christ, always with them as He promised —He is their joy and comfort now, as He is their hope of glory in the future. If the Bible were lost out of the world, the fundamental truths of Christianity would be

preserved in the Universal Christian Experience.

(3) The Testimony of Christian History.

Christianity fills a large place in this world of ours. It is not easy to define the word Christianity and give it its full meaning. If there are one billion five hundred hundred millions of human beings on the face of the earth, it is said that one-third of them, five hundred millions, are called Christians. They profess to worship Christ and honor His teachings. They are organized in churches and meet regularly for worship. They are striving to lead others to believe in Christ at home and in foreign lands. Divided as they are into Denominations, they are becoming united and enthusiastic in giving the Gospel to all the nations of the earth. The strongest, best educated and most progressive peoples of the world call themselves Christians. But outside of the Christian Church, the by-products of this religion are remarkable. Outside of the influence of Christianity, woman is ignorant, enslaved and dishonored. Christianity is giving her her true position as queen of the home, and Christian homes are the result. The time was when a large part of the people were slaves. Christianity has almost completely banished slavery from the earth. We have Christian art, Christian music, and a large part of our best literature is Christian in character and spirit. Childhood is now cared for and Paidology has become a science. Benevolent institutions are caring for the unfortunate, the aged and the helpless. Efforts are made to prevent the evils of intemperance, and the time is near at hand when war will cease and peace will be universal. All these are the work of Christianity. Surely Christianity is the greatest thing in the world How shall we account for its existence, its spirit and its

conquering power? No stream rises higher than its source. Every effect has a cause and the cause is adequate to and greater than its effect. How shall we account for Christianity?

Is Christianity a union of the best there is in the religions of the world, or the fruitage of the world's philosophy and accumulated wisdom? No one makes this claim. It has lived and done its work with all these arrayed against it. The trail of its history is red with the blood of its martyrs. For centuries men and nations were persecuting it, endeavoring to banish it from the earth. It has been a cause "everywhere spoken against" The most of the men who first went abroad preaching this religion died as martyrs to their faith. And yet here it is in its power and glory, going forth "conquering and to conquer." Our question recurs: How shall we account for Christianity? It is a fact today that these Christians find in Christ their joy, their hope, their inspiration and their source of power. They will tell you that Christ is Christianity and Christianity is Christ. Follow their history back for near two thousand years, and you will come to a mountain in Palestine; a company is gathered there and a man speaks to them. Listen to His words: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Having uttered these words He ascended out of their sight into the heavens and they saw Him no more. Then they went forth in obedience to His command and He made His promise good and has been with them all these centuries as He said He would. But if Christ and Christ alone accounts for Christianity, who then is Christ? As

He went about teaching He spoke often of His Kingdom. He said it was like a grain of mustard seed, so small and yet it grew so large that the birds made their nests in its branches. He said His Kingdom was like the little leaven in the dough, and yet it mastered and changed it all. The beginning was small, but today Christianity is great indeed. It was a kingdom which He established and He is the King. Who then is Christ? What think ye of Christ?

The Christian Scriptures tell us that He is the Eternal Christ who in the beginning was with God and was God He was the Creator of the heavens and the earth. They tell us that He entered humanity and thus became the Incarnate Christ, "God manifest in the flesh," that He revealed God to men and thus became their Savior. Christian Experience tells us that He is the Indwelling Christ, always with His people, offering His companionship and His transforming power to all who will receive Him. Christian history declares that Christianity is Christ's Kingdom. He is a king, and His kingdom shall fill the whole earth and His will shall be done on earth even as it is done in heaven. All hail! O Christ thou conquering King! "Lift up your heads O ye gates; even lift them up ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is the King of Glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of Glory."

"Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father: to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

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